Voices from the Margin:
Youth, Identity and Belonging in a Tourist Destination

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal
The study aimed to explore how young people negotiate a sense of identity and belonging amidst the continuous flow of visitors and other related demands on host tourism communities. It thus contributes to the evident gap that still persists in tourism scholarship around understandings of childhood and the key role young people can play in tourism research (Canosa, Moyle & Wray, 2016).

Objectives
The objectives or questions guiding the study include:

1. How do young people perceive that growing up in a tourist destination affects their lives including their sense of identity and belonging?

2. How do adults who work with young people perceive the experience of growing up in the Byron Shire?

3. How does participatory research with young people challenge and extend understandings of their lived experience of growing up in a tourist destination?

Methodology
This research employed critical ethnographic and participatory methods to explore the lived experiences of young people (between the ages of 10 and 24 years) residing in the Australian tourist destination of Byron Bay and surrounding communities (Canosa, 2016). Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out over 12 months and included a range of methods such as secondary data analysis (e.g. historical documents, newspaper articles, key policies and statistical data) and interviews and focus groups with 74 young

people in the community. Twenty of these young people also engaged in two participatory projects which resulted in the creation of three stop-motion animations and 11 peer-interviews (Canosa, Wilson & Graham, 2017). Additionally, 14 adults in key youth and community roles were interviewed. This was primarily to gain their perspectives on the opportunities and challenges faced by young people in the Byron Shire. Prolonged engagement in the field facilitated a deeper and more nuanced understanding of young people’s lived experiences and created the opportunity for a more authentic engagement of young people in the participatory projects.

Results
Findings centred on a range of key issues including participants’ lived experience of their environment and the many subtle strategies employed to negotiate identity and belonging. This research highlights the multiple constructions and interpretations of childhood in a tourist destination. Recurring and dominant themes included young people’s narratives about growing up in an idyllic place in contact with nature and surrounded by beautiful landscapes (Canosa, Graham & Wilson, 2018). The strong attachment to nature and place has developed an environmentalist identity or consciousness among young locals who are concerned about the impacts of tourism on the environment.

Other themes included the challenges young residents face in negotiating a sense of belonging when crowded spaces and unfamiliar faces contribute to feelings of alienation, displacement and perceived lack of safety. Young people in this research often commented on the shrinking sense of community as more and more places become overcrowded and commercialised. Young people, however, actively reaffirm identity and belonging through a series of practices such as avoidance and creating ‘locals-only’ spaces. Youth subcultural groups and tribes thus become an important way for young locals to fulfil their needs for affiliation and belonging in the face of ever-changing transnational flows of tourists and temporary migrants in the community.

Theoretical conclusions
This research is significant in that it provides rich insight into the views and experiences of young people who grow up in a tourist destination. In doing so, it not only addresses a significant gap in much tourism research to date but also challenges existing disciplinary boundaries by bringing tourism studies into dialogue with childhood studies. It does this within a broader anthropological approach enabling deeper exploration of the social and cultural issues shaping young people’s lives. Importantly, the research engages a critical and transformative lens that seeks to profile the voices of a previously marginalised population. The study also makes a significant methodological contribution by employing participatory methods. Actively engaging young people in the research process offers a unique and deeper insight into young people’s lived experiences and provides the potential for empowering young people to bring about positive transformational change in their lives and communities.

Practical application of the dissertation
The study has important implications for local government policy and planning to inform sustainable tourism planning and youth development programs. Policies and programs should be geared specifically towards enhancing the positive and decreasing the negative implications of tourism in the community and aim to foster an environment where young people are consulted and valued. Focusing on the needs of young people growing up in socially, culturally and economically complex communities – such as tourist destinations – is crucial to the wellbeing of this population.

Content of the dissertation
Abstract of Chapter 1
The Introductory chapter explores how the historical evolution of the Byron Shire, from rural seaside villages to iconic international tourism destination, has had an impact on the socio-cultural fabric of the communities in this area. Tourism, in this sense, was (and still is) a potent force of social change for the communities in the Byron Shire. The flows of
migrants and tourists to the area have, in fact, shaped local practices and values, and are deeply ingrained in the local identity. This holistic anthropological analysis provides a contextual background to better understand young people’s lived experiences. This chapter also sets the scene for the study introducing the key aims and objectives of the research.

Abstract of Chapter 2
Chapter Two presents a review of the literature and the interdisciplinary interests that inform the study. In order to build synergies between two broad interdisciplinary fields of inquiry (tourism studies and childhood studies), the research adopts a transdisciplinary approach which allows for movement between and beyond disciplinary boundaries. The relationship between a child’s development and the environmental influences in the community, which contribute to shaping his/her identity, is a complex or “wicked” problem which requires a creative approach that transcends the disciplinary barriers of single or multiple disciplinary research. The study is also underpinned by anthropological interests in the social and cultural dynamics of young people’s lived experiences; as such, it employs socio-cultural theory to explore these issues (Rogoff, 2003). The chapter draws attention to the absence of young people under the age of 18 years in previous tourism studies arguing that they are a ‘voiceless population’ (Small, 2008).

Abstract of Chapter 3
Chapter Three establishes the ontological and epistemological stance of this study, the critical or transformative worldview. The ontological basis of this study lies in the view that reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender and age-specific values, all of which are underpinned by power dynamics. The chapter also draws attention to the positivist legacy which has dominated – and perhaps still dominates – the field of community-focused tourism research and which has precluded the involvement of young people in the research process (Canosa et al., 2016). The general lack of understanding of the socio-cultural, political and environmental context in which perceptions about tourism are formed in host communities, as well as the lack of engagement with wider theoretical and methodological innovation and progress in other social sciences, has resulted in a stale and repetitive reproduction of quantitative-based studies which runs the risk of adding little knowledge to, and understanding of, the deeper implications of tourism development for host communities (Deery et al., 2012). As such, critical ethnography and participatory methods are employed as methodological tools to respond to the social inequality of the absence of young people’s voices in tourism research. Chapter Three also describes in detail the fieldwork methods and ethical considerations of the study.

Abstract of Chapter 4
Chapter Four presents the findings from the interviews and focus groups with 74 young people between the ages of 10 and 24 years. These findings provide insight into the lived experiences of young people growing up in the Byron Shire and attempt to address Research Question One of the study. Findings highlight the multiple constructions and interpretations of childhood in a tourist destination. Young people’s narratives fluctuate between experiences of nature and an idyllic childhood to experiences of alienation and a perceived lack of safety due to the popularity of the region as a tourist destination. The chapter, however, also highlights the active and agentive role that young people have in negotiating identity and belonging in their community.

Abstract of Chapter 5
Chapter Five explores adults’ perceptions of the issues that young people face growing up in the Byron Shire and addresses Research Question Two. Whereas findings in this chapter have many similarities with the findings from the interviews and focus groups with young people, they also highlight how adults foregrounded the socio-cultural forces which shape the experience of childhood and the threats and dangers that young people face growing up in a tourist destination. Adults
thus have more of a ‘structural’ view of childhood compared to young people’s experiences of ‘agency’ in their community.

Abstract of Chapter 6
Chapter Six explores how agency is enacted when young people are invited to participate as co-researchers. Through participatory and visual methodologies, the chapter outlines some of the benefits of co-researching with young people. In so doing, it addresses Research Question Three of the study by reflecting on the opportunity that participatory research with children provides for delving deeper into their experiences, views and opinions. The chapter also describes some of the ethical complexities of participatory methods and the need for a reflexive engagement in the field.

Abstract of Chapter 7
The thesis concludes in Chapter Seven by integrating the findings from the previous three chapters and discussing their overall meaning in relation to existing literature. The contribution of the thesis is also presented with a number of implications for future research.

References: